

Susan Casey
Defense-Victim Outreach Specialist

March 29, 2019

Dear [REDACTED]:

I am writing to introduce myself and offer information about my work with survivors of violent crime and family members whose loved ones have been murdered. This role is relatively new to the criminal justice system and is based upon restorative justice concepts, which focus on better addressing the needs and concerns of those who suffered harm. I work to assist defense attorneys with outreach to families and survivors, offering them the opportunity to engage with the defense team representing the person charged with committing the crime.

I was deeply saddened to learn about the tragic and devastating attacks on your congregations on October 27th last year. I cannot imagine the pain and difficulty that you have faced since that day. The news reports reflecting on the lives of the eleven people who were murdered –

– reveal common threads about each individual's legacy of kindness, generosity, service, and faithfulness. I am very sorry for the profound loss that you all have suffered. I hope that you have been surrounded and supported by your families, your friends, and your community.

The attorneys for Robert Bowers understand the importance of being sensitive to your concerns and interests as the legal case moves forward. Although the duty of defense attorneys is to represent their client, there are many ways in which they can adjust their efforts in consideration of what is important and helpful to you. They have asked me to assist them in offering a safe and respectful avenue of communication to those who may be interested. My role is to assist you and your congregants throughout the legal proceedings by getting answers to your questions, giving voice to your concerns to the defense team, offering responses and information, and trying to meet your needs within this process in any other ways that I can.

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My work is complementary to that of the victim advocate in the United States Attorney's Office, expanding the options available to family members by providing access to both legal parties in the criminal justice system. We have learned that some families find it uniquely helpful to have a relationship with both the defense and the prosecution through their respective liaisons. Some family members have questions that can only be answered by the defense attorneys or the defendant. Others want to express their concerns, beliefs, frustrations, and anger directly to the defense. And still others want specific information about what to expect from the legal process, including the trial and later appeals. There are many other possibilities, and the focus of my work is to learn about each person's concerns and to facilitate greater understanding and communication.

To clarify further, my role is not to defend Mr. Bowers in court or elsewhere. Instead, my responsibility is to offer a safe and respectful avenue for you and your congregants to communicate with the defense team, should you and they choose to do so. How these communications might evolve is guided solely by each person's wishes.

I am planning to be in Pittsburgh in both April and May and would welcome the opportunity to meet you to further introduce myself and talk about how I might best offer assistance. If there are others whom you would like to invite to join such a meeting, I would be grateful to meet them as well. As the defense attorneys noted in their letter to you, we will be reaching out to some of your congregants in the months ahead and before we do that, we wanted to inform you and seek any input you may have about the most appropriate ways to be in contact. I will try to reach each of you by phone or email in the coming week to see if you are interested in meeting and, if so, to schedule a time and place convenient for you. Please know that you may also call or email me at _____ or _____.

I will close by again wishing you and your congregations strength and support from those around you. I hope to speak with you soon.

With kind regards,


Susan Casey